

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The City of Boulder is an active, sports oriented community. This Athletic Field Study (AFS) provides an analysis of the BPRD's existing inventory of rectangular and diamond fields and what happens to this inventory under different supply and demand assumptions. The recommendations and action items that are derived from this analysis provide direction as to what the department can do in the next 1 to 3 years to address field programming, condition, and capacity issues. The recommendations also provide guidance on how to better position the department to be proactive in responding to and meeting future athletic field needs.

Project Purpose and Goals

The Boulder Parks and Recreation Department (BPRD) 2014 Master Plan highlighted the need to complete a comprehensive analysis of current athletic field facilities, programming, and policies to better understand our existing conditions and how groups currently use our facilities. The need for the study is an initiative of Theme 2 of the Master Plan which emphasizes the importance of taking care of existing facilities before investing in new development without having a thorough understanding of needs, funding options, and long term operational costs.

The purpose of the AFS was to look at existing conditions and use information to develop data-driven recommendations and strategies for delivering high-quality facilities that meet the needs of the community while balancing this with the fiscal and physical constraints of the department.

Process and Plan Organization

In January of 2014 the department hired the consulting office of MIG Portland, to complete the AFS. The scope of the consultant was to 1) review and evaluate existing field inventory and condition information completed by the department in 2013; 2) analyze reported field use against existing supply; 3) develop specific policy and field use / development recommendations based on quantitative information; and 4) refine the list of recommendations to a targeted group of strategies that could be implemented and advanced within 3 years of the report's completion.

The process of developing and completing the AFS occurred over three phases of work. Phase I was an analysis of the existing conditions. Phase II was an analysis of supply and demand. And phase III was the development of the recommendations and the overall report. The three phases took place over the course of approximately 1.5 years and involved the following efforts:

- Outreach to Boulder sports groups over two focus group meetings;
- On-line and paper based surveys to sports user groups;
- Review of a statistically valid community survey with elements of the survey focusing on sports and athletic field use in the City;
- Updates at public meetings during the Valmont City Park concept plan update process;
- Updates to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB); and
- Regular coordination meetings between the consultant and athletic field operational staff.

In March of 2015, Parks and Department staff completed the contract with the consultant, MIG, with the document not fully finalized. Staff finished the report in July of 2015.

Summary of Key Findings

The findings presented in the AFS identify key themes that emerged and highlight conclusions that could be made after an assessment of the qualitative and quantitative data that was gathered during Phase I and Phase II of the project. These findings set the framework for the development of the recommendations and 3-year action plan covered in Phase III.

Generally, the findings reveal that while there is a deficit of field hours when user preferences are considered. However, feedback from the community and guidance from the BPRD Master Plan indicates that an emphasis should be placed on maintaining and enhancing existing facilities before new development occurs.

While user group preferences must be taken into consideration in any analysis of athletic field supply and demand, it cannot be the singular driver of available hours and field use. The City of Boulder land use policies emphasize the desire to remain a compact, interconnected community that places high priority on the preservation and enhancement of existing physical, social and economic assets through strict managed growth. The recommendations for addressing field availability, must then respect this and focus on enhancing existing facilities, providing flexible designs, and working with partners; with new development being considered under the right circumstances.

Field Hour Surplus. Generally, BPRD has a surplus of available total weekly field hours for both rectangular and diamond fields. This surplus begins to decrease as user preferences are taken into consideration.

Availability of rectangular and diamond fields. Generally, there is a greater availability of field hours for rectangular fields versus diamond field hours.

Programs and facilities with a youth focus. Based on assumptions where youth-centered programming and policies are a focus, there is a deficiency of available field hours for diamond and rectangular fields. The position of focusing on youth of high school age and under is substantiated by findings of the AFS that indicate 65% of field demand for diamond fields and that 77% of demand for rectangular fields is generated from youth leagues versus adult leagues.

Field availability for adult leagues must be considered. Adult league play is an important component of the programs, services, and facilities provided by the BPRD. Public feedback indicates that there is a concern that a focus on youth will result in a 'take-away' from adult athletic field availability.

Population Demands. Current growth projections indicate that new rectangular and diamond fields will be necessary by 2030 to maintain current levels of service.

Year-round play. Based on user-reported field demand information, leagues are playing year-round. As such, there is a greater need for fields that can accommodate play for longer periods of the day and year.

BVSD joint use agreement. A new and strong joint use agreement with the Boulder Valley School District (BVSD) could generate significant available field hours to the athletic field inventory.

Flexible field design to accommodate wide ranging uses and ages. The diversity of field sports currently played in Boulder, as well as, the range of age groups playing requires fields that can accommodate a variety of configurations and play options.

Recommendations and the Action Plan

Based on the findings developed during Phases I and II, the AFS proposes a comprehensive set of recommendations for enhancing athletic fields and related programs and services. The full array of these proposals, while achievable, will take a significant period of time to be realized. These recommendations focus on opportunities to enhance service delivery through changes in policy, management and operations, and the investment in existing and, where appropriate, new athletic field facilities.

While the full listing of recommendations developed during the third phase of the work are covered in Chapter 4, the following are specific, actionable items that can be advanced and implemented within 3 years of the completion of the AFS.

Invest in existing facilities to maximize their use. There a number of city-owned fields or facilities within the park system, that with enhancements to field conditions, basic amenities, or the improvement to 'basic' levels of service, have the potential to increase the capacity of field use or allow for a wider variety of activities.

Short Term Rectangular Field Enhancements (1 to 2 year time period). Enhance field conditions and amenities and allow for reservations at the following sites, where necessary:

- East Palo Park
- Keewaydin Park
- Martin Park
- North Boulder Park
- Scott Carpenter Park
- Pleasantview Fields

Short Term Diamond Field Enhancements (1 to 2 year time period). Enhance field conditions and amenities and allow for a wider variety of league play:

- Martin Park
- North Boulder Park

Mid-Term Diamond Field Enhancements (2 to 3 year time period). Develop a site plan for the following fields based on new planning studies:

- Mapleton Ball Fields
- Stazio Ball Fields (Phase III)
- Tom Watson Fields

Long Term Diamond and Rectangular Field Enhancements (3+ year time period). Develop and implement a site plan for the build-out of following fields based on current master plans for the site.

- Foothills Community Park Phase III
- Valmont City Park

Work with BVSD to create a stronger Joint Use Agreement. Create a working group between BPRD and BVSD with the purpose of developing a new joint use agreement between the organizations. The joint use agreement should identify new or existing City or BVSD fields that have the greatest potential to meet the needs of both organizations and the larger community.

In the short-term, the City and BVSD should work together to identify and eliminate the barriers to reserving BVSD fields that are in the current joint use agreement but not scheduled. The use of these fields has the potential to generate approximately 1,000 hours of additional field hours between rectangular and diamond fields.

In coordination with BVSD, take a leadership role in convening agencies and organizations to improve collaboration and coordination of efforts. Both BPRD and BVSD should work in partnership to serve as a convener of local agencies and organizations with the purpose of having a greater awareness of current trends and concerns and being able to proactively plan for change.

Update BPRD's 'Policies' document for field and court assignment and permits. The document that is used for field and court allocations should be updated to reflect the Department's direction of being an organization with a focus on youth engagement and activities. This includes updating sections pertaining to user group priority ratings, field allocation criteria, and fees.

Develop criteria for tournament reservations. The section of the Policies and Procedures for Field and Court Assignments and Permits should be updated to include specific guidance on the amount of time that should be allocated to tournaments and which tournaments should have a higher priority. These updates and revisions should reflect the Department's direction of being focused on youth engagement and activity.

Pilot the use of premier rectangular fields for practice. Conduct a pilot project to allow use of Premiere diamond fields for practice for one year, with regular monitoring of turf and field conditions to determine whether this is a sustainable practice. Scheduling should take into consideration field preparation for games, which may require rotating field availability.

Fund and implement projects that will provide a better basic level of service. Fund and implement projects at existing facilities that will enhance users' experience with the provision of basic services such as restroom facilities and parking.

Continue to develop a strong model for partnerships, philanthropic efforts and recognition, and volunteer opportunities with the community and the department.